THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GROUP EXPERIMENTAL LEVEL OF ASPIRATION MEASURES AND SELF-ESTIMATES OF PERSONALITY

HENRY N. RICCIUTI

and

DOUGLAS G. SCHULTZ

Office of Naval Research Contract Nonr-694(00)
Project Designation NR 151-113

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

May 1954

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GROUP EXPERIMENTAL LEVEL OF ASPIRATION MEASURES AND SELF-ESTIMATES OF PERSONALITY

Henry N. Ricciuti

and

Douglas G. Schultz

Office of Naval Research Contract Nonr-694(00)

Project Designation NR 151-113

Educational Testing Service

Princeton, New Jersey

May 1954

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GROUP EXPERIMENTAL LEVEL OF ASPIRATION MEASURES AND SELF-ESTIMATES OF PERSONALITY

Abstract

This research was concerned with the relationship between the individual's level of aspiration in regard to performance on cognitive tasks, and his reported self-perceptions and desires with respect to various traits in his personality. Two group-administrable level of aspiration tasks were used, one involving three trials on a general ability test, the other, eight trials on a code-learning task. Subjects computed their scores after each trial, and then stated what score they would try to make on the following trial. The difference between each performance and the following aspiration, averaged over all trials, was the principal level of aspiration measure used.

A total of 144 male and 99 female college students took one or both level of aspiration tasks, as well as a Check List in which the individual is asked to describe himself as he is, and as he would like to be, on each of 81 heterogeneous personality and ability traits. A number of scores reflecting various self-evaluative tendencies were obtained from the Check List responses.

Results indicated that the height of the individual's level of aspiration on the cognitive tasks was not related to his over-all self-criticalness, or dissatisfaction with self. However, high aspiration level tended to be associated somewhat with a relatively favorable self-appraisal on a cluster of ability traits, and with the desire to attain a more favorable status even when present status is reported as already being very high. Individuals showing the two characteristics just mentioned tended not only to set high aspirations on the cognitive tasks, but also to adjust their aspirations from trial to trial with little regard to preceding upward or downward shifts in performance. The results suggest that several of the measures under study may reflect the intensity of the individual's desire to approximate the ideal self even when the present self-image is highly favorable.

A comparison of responses to individual Check List traits given by high and low level of aspiration groups indicated that these groups may be differentiable in terms of psychologically meaningful trait clusters.

The Relationship between Group Experimental Level of Aspiration Measures and Self-Estimates of Personality[1]

Henry N. Ricciuti and Douglas G. Schultz

Educational Testing Service and Pennsylvania State University

Approximately twenty years have elapsed since Hausman (6) and Frank (5), drawing upon the previous theoretical formulations of Dembo (4) and Hoppe (7), introduced the now well-known "level of aspiration" method for appraising experimentally the manner in which an individual sets and adjusts his goals. Since that time, many studies have been undertaken to explore the value of the level of aspiration approach, in various forms, as a technique for obtaining objective measures of important individual differences in goal-striving behavior. Although attempts to demonstrate clear-cut relationships between various experimentally obtained level of aspiration indices and other relevant personality characteristics have not been uniformly successful, the net evidence appears to support the belief that the level of aspiration method constitutes a valuable approach for the measurement of important individual differences in personality.

The present investigation was concerned with an evaluation of the psychological meaningfulness of level of aspiration measures obtained with two experimental procedures which were recently devised by the authors for

---

[1]This research was supported by the Office of Naval Research, under Contract No. Nonr-694(00) with the Educational Testing Service. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the United States Navy.

---

group administration (10). These group techniques were intended to parallel the classical individually administered level of aspiration methods, and were developed after a survey had been made of the many methodological variations which are found in level of aspiration studies (9). In a previous study, the writers investigated the possibility that the group level of aspiration measures might reflect some of the motivational factors bearing upon college grades, but little evidence in support of this hypothesis was found (11). The present research was undertaken in order to explore further some of the personality correlates associated with the level of aspiration measures yielded by the group techniques.

Principal interest in this study was centered upon the relationships between the individual's stated aspirations regarding performance on certain cognitive tasks, and his expressed desires (or "aspirations", to use the word somewhat loosely) with respect to various traits in his own personality. On theoretical grounds, one would expect to find meaningful relationships between these two types of responses since they both involve expressed goals or strivings of the individual. With the exception of a recent study by Bills (1), little attention appears to have been given to the relationship between aspirations regarding performance and the individual's desires with respect to his own personality. The present research represents an exploratory study of this problem.

Experimental Procedure

Subjects

An over-all total of 144 male and 99 female undergraduate students at a large eastern university were utilized in the research. Various analyses were carried out on sub-groups ranging in size from 55 to 124.

Description of techniques and measures utilized

Level of aspiration techniques. Two experimental level of aspiration techniques suitable for group administration (10) were used. One method involves the administration of three successive five-minute trials on an omnibus-type general ability test;[2] the other technique consists of eight successive thirty-second trials on a letter-word-symbol code learning task. Both of these tasks show considerable learning effects over the trials performed.

In both techniques, the identical administrative procedure was followed. After each trial was completed, subjects were asked to determine and record their scores. They were then asked to record privately their level of aspiration for the trial which was to follow, in answer to the orally presented question: "What score are you really going to try to make on the next trial?"

The principal level of aspiration measure derived from this sequence of performances and aspirations was the commonly used "goal discrepancy score." This score was obtained by averaging, over all trials, the difference between the individual's expressed level of aspiration and his immediately preceding performance, i.e., aspiration minus performance. The magnitude and sign of this measure thus give an indication of the individual's tendency to set high, moderate, or low goals relative to his performance level.

For exploratory purposes, two other measures were derived for each individual from the code-learning data. One of these measures represented the variability of the discrepancies between each aspiration level and

---

[2] SRA Verbal Form, published by Science Research Associates, Chicago 4, Illinois.

the preceding performance. It was obtained by determining the average deviation of these trial-to-trial discrepancies about the mean goal-discrepancy score for all trials. This variability measure thus indicates whether the person tends to set his aspirations at a consistent or varying distance from preceding performance.

The other measure was intended to reflect the "appropriateness" or "responsiveness" of the shifts in the aspiration level relative to preceding changes in performance. A "responsive" shift in the level of aspiration was arbitrarily defined as a change which followed the same direction as the immediately preceding shift in performance. Since the same number of trials was involved for all subjects, the "responsiveness" measure was obtained by counting the total number of times the aspiration was raised after a preceding gain in performance, lowered after a preceding drop in performance, or maintained constant when the preceding performance had shown no change.[3]

Self-description Check List. This Check List consists of 81 brief phrases comprising a group of heterogeneous personality and ability traits.[4]

---

[3]This responsiveness measure is identical with that used by Sears (12). A similar responsiveness score may be obtained on the basis of upward shifts following "success" and downward shifts after "failure", where "success" and "failure" are defined as reaching or exceeding the aspiration level and not reaching the aspiration level, respectively.

[4]Most of the traits in the Check List were adapted from Cattell's (2) group of thirty-five "surface" traits, with each of his bipolar traits being represented by two separate, and presumably opposing, traits scattered at random throughout the Check List. The other main source was Murray's list of abilities and achievements (8, pp. 229-230).

For each trait the individual was asked to make two responses, indicating his perceived and desired status, respectively. The first response was a self-description on a four point scale as follows: "I tend to be: not at all, slightly, moderately, or very...(e.g., talkative)..." The second response required that the subject indicate on a three point scale whether: "I would like to be: less...(e.g., talkative)...than I am now, about the same as I am now, or more...(e.g., talkative)...than I am now."

Five different scores reflecting various self-evaluative tendencies were obtained from the Check List responses, and are described below.

An over-all "self-criticalness" score was obtained by counting the number of traits in the list for which the subject expressed a desire to change, either in the "more" or "less" direction (Self-criticalness, total). A second self-criticalness score was obtained in the same manner for a sub-group of 12 traits representing skills or abilities (Self-criticalness, ability cluster). In both cases, a high score represents operationally a high degree of expressed self-criticalness or lack of satisfaction with present status.

The next two Check List measures were designated as "extreme self-criticalness" scores. These measures were based upon the number of times the subject gave a response-combination in which he expresses a desire to move still further in the "better" direction even though his present status is reported as already being at the "good" extreme of the trait continuum. Such responses are relatively atypical. An example of this "extreme" response-combination in the case of favorable traits would be: "I am very intelligent and I'd like to be more so;" for unfavorable traits

an example would be: "I am not at all suspicious and I'd like to be less so." It was felt that such extreme response-combinations might be regarded as reflecting a particularly strong desire to move in the "ideal" direction, or as an indication that the individual placed a particularly high value, either positive or negative, on the trait in question. The total number of these extreme response-combinations given by each individual was determined for the entire Check List (Extreme self-criticalness, total), and also for the sub-group of ability traits (Extreme self-criticalness, ability cluster).

The fifth Check List score represented the individual's over-all self-appraisal on the 12 traits in the ability cluster. It was obtained by adding the values (1-4) associated with the first, or self-descriptive, responses for these traits; high scores represented a favorable self-description.

Collection of experimental data

The level of aspiration tasks and the Self-description Check List were administered to various subject groups during regularly scheduled classroom periods. The order of administration was (1) Level of Aspiration: General Ability Task, (2) Level of Aspiration: Code Learning Task, and (3) Self-description Check List. All groups took at least one of the level of aspiration tasks as well as the Check List; some groups took all three tests.

By way of introduction, the subjects were told that they were to be given some tests of general intelligence and learning ability for research purposes, and that the investigators were interested in finding

how well college students could perform on the tasks. No indication was given in advance that they would be asked to make aspiration statements, this part of the procedure being introduced quite incidentally after the first performance scores had been determined and recorded.

Analysis and Results

Relationship between level of aspiration measures based upon the two different experimental tasks

Place Table 1 about here

A matter of considerable theoretical interest is the agreement between experimental level of aspiration measures derived from different tasks. In the present study, the correlation between the aspiration measures based on the general ability test and those based on the code learning task was found to be .44 for males, and .63 for females, as indicated in Table 1. These values are somewhat higher than those usually reported, and indicate a reasonable degree of generality for the two aspiration measures (goal discrepancy scores) under study. The considerably higher value obtained for the women represents an interesting finding, since it suggests the possibility that the aspirations of college women may be more generalized across various types of activities than is true for males. This hypothesis appears to warrant further study.

Statistically, the correlations just mentioned between the two aspiration scores owe little or nothing to the similarity between performance on the different tasks for two reasons, which are apparent from

Table 1

Correlations between Level of Aspiration Measures and Performance Measures on Two Experimental Tasks (N's in Parentheses)

			GENERAL ABILITY TASK		CODE LEARNING TASK			
			2		3		4	
			Average Performance		Level of Aspiration (Goal Disc. Score)		Average Performance	
			M	F	M	F	M	F
GENERAL ABILITY TASK	Level of Aspiration (Goal Discrepancy Score)	1	.15 (103)	.14 (66)	.44** (78)	.63** (55)	--	--
	Average Performance	2	--	--	--	--	.27* (78)	.35** (55)
CODE LEARNING TASK	Level of Aspiration (Goal Discrepancy Score)	3	--	--	--	--	.13 (126)	.22* (90)
	Average Performance	4	--	--	--	--	--	--

*Correlation significant at 5% level.

**Correlation significant at 1% level.

the other correlations in Table 1: first, average performance scores on the two tasks correlated only .27 for males and .35 for females and second, the aspiration score on each task was only slightly correlated with performance on the task itself (.15 and .14 in the case of the general ability task, .13 and .22 in the case of code learning).

Relationship between level of aspiration measures and scores on Self-description Check List

Table 2 contains the correlations obtained between the two level of aspiration measures (goal discrepancy scores) and the various Check List scores previously described. Separate values are presented for males and females. Neither the total self-criticalness score nor the self-criticalness score for the ability cluster show any consistent relationship to the level of aspiration measures (r's from -.17 to +.11). However, the two extreme self-criticalness scores reveal a slight positive correlational trend, particularly in relation to the code learning aspiration measures. The highest correlations (.18 and .20) are found between the code learning aspiration scores and extreme self-criticalness on the ability cluster (e.g., "I am very intelligent and I would like to be more so"). A positive correlational trend is also indicated between the self-appraisal score on the ability cluster and the two level of aspiration measures.

Place Table 2 about here

Although the correlations just mentioned are quite small, with only two of them reaching significance at the 5% level, the pattern of relationships obtained appears to be a meaningful one. The mere number

Table 2

Correlations between Level of Aspiration Measures and Scores on Self-Description Check List, together with Means and Sigmas for All Measures

Self-Description Check List		Level of Aspiration (Goal Discrepancy Scores)				Self-Description Check List	
		General Ability Task		Code Learning Task			
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Mean	σ
Self-criticalness, total	M	.08		-.03		39.06	16.65
	F		-.07		.04	39.19	13.72[b]
Self-criticalness, ability cluster	M	.07		-.04		8.02	3.15
	F		-.17		.11	8.02	2.47[b]
Extreme self-criticalness, total	M	.09		.12		[b]5.50	7.09
	F		.06		.08	[b]3.62	5.37[a]
Extreme self-criticalness, ability cluster	M	-.03		.18*		[b]1.10	1.51
	F		.02		.20	[b].70	1.30
Self-appraisal, ability cluster	M	.04		.20*		[a]35.10	4.41
	F		.17		.11	[a]33.01	4.24
N		98	65	124	89	(Above figures based on 124 males, 89 females)	
M		10.89	10.47	3.74	3.84		
σ		6.98	6.11	2.49	2.30		

*Correlations significant at 5% level.

[a]Sex difference significant at 1% level.

[b]Sex difference significant at 5% level.

of times an individual indicates dissatisfaction with his present status on various personality traits (self-criticalness) is not related to the height of the goals he sets for himself on the level of aspiration tasks. However, the height of his expressed goals on the code learning task, shows a tendency to be related positively to the frequency of occurrence of the extreme self-critical response, particularly on the ability trait cluster. At the same time, there is some indication that individuals who set high goals on the aspiration tasks tend to describe themselves relatively more favorably on the ability traits.[5]

As mentioned previously, two additional measures were derived from the code learning task, one representing the variability of the individual's level of aspiration, while the other reflected the "responsiveness" of the level of aspiration to changes in preceding performance. Correlations between these measures and three of the Check List scores are presented in Table 3.

- - - - - - -

Place Table 3
about here

- - - - - - -

The data reveal that the tendency to make extreme self-critical responses on the ability cluster is correlated slightly with the

---

[5]The reader should be reminded that the extreme self-criticalness score and the self-appraisal score on the ability cluster are by definition experimentally related measures. They do not markedly overlap one another, however, ($r = .53$).

Table 3

Correlations between Variability of Level of Aspiration, "Responsiveness" of Level of Aspiration, and Scores in Self-Description Check List

	Level of Aspiration (Code Learning Task)			
	Variability (Average deviation of goal discrepancy scores)		Responsiveness (No. of times aspiration is shifted in same direction as preceding shift in performance)	
Self-Description Check List	M	F	M	F
Self-criticalness, total	-.13	.01	.14	.07
Extreme self-criticalness, ability cluster	.14	.14	-.18*	-.30**
Self-appraisal, ability cluster	.12	.17	-.14	-.25*
N	124	89	120	87
M	1.27	1.21	3.83	3.84
σ	.75	.74	1.27--b--1.57	

*Correlation significant at 5% level.

**Correlation significant at 1% level.

[b]Sex difference significant at 5% level.

variability of the aspiration measures (r's = .14, .14), and to a greater degree, but negatively, with the "responsiveness" of the level of aspiration (r's = -.18, -.30). It is thus indicated that the individual who makes many extreme self-critical responses on the ability traits has a slight tendency to set his levels of aspiration a varying distance from the preceding performance from trial to trial. At the same time, the direction of the shifts in his successive levels of aspiration tends to show little "appropriateness" in relation to preceding upward or downward changes in performance. These same tendencies to set variable and "unresponsive" aspirations are also associated with favorable self-appraisal on the ability cluster.

In summary, the principal relationships evidenced by the data in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that high aspirations, as well as aspirations which are somewhat unresponsive to performance changes, tend to be associated with favorable self-appraisal on ability traits, and also with relatively frequent "extreme" trait responses which reflect the individual's desire to improve present status even though it is already highly favorable.

It is interesting to note that the strongest relationships with the level of aspiration measures were found for the two Check List scores based upon the ability trait cluster. These findings might be accounted for, at least in part, in terms of the hypothesis that for the student groups tested, the ability traits elicited a higher degree of ego-involvement than did the other traits in the list. Some empirical evidence that greater "value" or "importance" was attached to the preselected ability traits was obtainable from the data in the present study.

The 81 traits in the Check List were ranked in terms of the percentage of individuals who expressed a desire to have more of the trait (if a favorable one) or less of the trait (if an unfavorable one). This yielded a ranking based upon the extent to which each trait was actually "desired" or "not desired" by the group.

The twelve traits selected on a priori grounds for inclusion in the ability cluster fell among the first seventeen "most desired" traits in the Check List for males, and among the first twenty for females. These results seem to support the notion that in this situation the ability traits were more ego-involving, and hence tended to be somewhat more related to the experimental level of aspiration measures than were the other traits in the Check List.

Sex differences in means and standard deviations

An examination of the means and standard deviations for males and females in Tables 2 and 3 indicates no significant sex differences in the level of aspiration measures. (Males have frequently been reported as having higher levels of aspiration than females.) However, in the case of the Check List scores, it is interesting to note that males have significantly higher means on the two extreme self-criticalness measures, as well as on the ability self-appraisal score. At the same time, the males generally show greater group variability on most of the measures under study.

Relationship between aspiration measures on the code learning task and individual trait responses on the Self-description Check List

After the relationships just discussed had been studied, an analysis was made of the responses given to individual Check List traits by subjects with high, moderate, and low level of aspiration scores on the code learning task. For each of sixty traits, the frequency of occurrence of all possible dual response-combinations was tabulated for the three level of aspiration groups. Separate analyses were made for the 124 males and 89 females. These data were then examined for relationships between the various trait responses and the level of aspiration measures.

When the responses given to the individual traits in the ability cluster were studied, no particularly meaningful trends were revealed, other than those already indicated by the correlations previously discussed. In the case of the remaining 48 "personality" items, a trait-by-trait examination of the extreme self-critical responses given by the high, middle, and low aspiration groups similarly failed to indicate any relationships of interest. However, the analysis did reveal some interesting differences in the self-descriptive, as well as the self-critical responses given by the contrasting level of aspiration groups.

Self-descriptive responses. In searching for relationships between aspiration level and the self-descriptive responses to each of the 48 personality traits, an identification was made of those traits which showed the greatest differences between the self-descriptions of the high and low aspiration groups. A mean group difference of at least .3 on the 1.0 - 4.0 self-description scale was arbitrarily set as the requirement for a trait to be included in the "most differentiating" group.

In the male sample, only one such trait was found to differentiate the extreme level of aspiration groups. For the females, however, eleven traits reached the required level in differentiating between the high and low groups. These traits are listed below in Summary A, according to the direction in which they characterized females with high level of aspiration.

- - - - - - - - -

Place Summary A
about here

- - - - - - - - -

Self-critical responses. A comparison of the relative frequency of occurrence of the "would like to be more so" and "would like to be less so" responses given by the contrasting level of aspiration groups for each of the 48 traits under study revealed some further trends of interest. An identification was made of those traits showing a difference of at least nine per cent between the high and low aspiration groups in the percentage of individuals giving the "more so" response in the case of favorable traits, or the "less so" response in the case of unfavorable traits. The traits which met the stated level in discriminating the high and low aspiration groups in terms of the incidence of "more so" or "less so" responses are listed in Summary B.

- - - - - - - - -

Place Summary B
about here

- - - - - - - - -

SUMMARY A

Self-descriptive Responses Characterizing Females
in High Level of Aspiration Group

HIGH LEVEL OF ASPIRATION FEMALES	
Self-description relatively HIGH on:	Self-description relatively LOW on:
energetic and spirited	
	able to tolerate delay in satisfying wants and desires
adventurous and eager to learn new things	
assertive and self-assured	
soft-hearted and unrealistic	
likes to draw attention to self and impress others	unconcerned about impressing others or getting their attention
conscientious and guided by ethical principles	
cheerful and optimistic	
able to get people to like and trust me	
easily fatigued, becoming nervous	

SUMMARY B

Self-critical Responses Showing Greatest Differentiation between High and Low Level of Aspiration Groups

HIGH LEVEL OF ASPIRATION MALES,		HIGH LEVEL OF ASPIRATION FEMALES,	
more often than LOWS, would like to be more:	more often than LOWS, would like to be less:	more often than LOWS, would like to be more:	more often than LOWS, would like to be less:
objective and level-headed emotionally	headstrong and self-willed	objective and level-headed emotionally	demanding and impatient
unconcerned about impressing others or getting attention	prone to draw attention to self and impress others		thoughtless about responsibilities
conscientious and guided by ethical principles*	thoughtless about responsibilities	responsible and dependable	careless and lenient about right and wrong
	fussy about illness**	frank and expressive	
	rigid and inflexible	good-natured and generous	rigid and inflexible
	easily fatigued, becoming nervous	capable of correcting others without giving offense	
		able to entertain and please the opposite sex***	
LOW LEVEL OF ASPIRATION MALES,		**LOW LEVEL OF ASPIRATION FEMALES,**	
more often than HIGHS, would like to be more:	more often than HIGHS, would like to be less:	more often than HIGHS, would like to be more:	more often than HIGHS, would like to be less:
assertive and self-assured	retiring and humble	assertive and self-assured	
persevering and determined		conscientious and guided by ethical principles*	
cheerful and optimistic	solemn and depressed	cheerful and optimistic	solemn and depressed
			suspicious and over-sensitive
polished and refined socially			critical and irritable
			fussy about illness**
able to entertain and please the opposite sex***			worrisome and anxious
			easily upset and embarrassed

*,**,*** Three traits showing sex difference in responses typical of high and low groups.

It should be pointed out that the trait relationships outlined in Summaries A and B were generally of small magnitude, and they were not tested for statistical significance. On the whole, however, they reveal a reasonably consistent pattern of differential trait responses possessing a good deal of psychological meaning. These findings, the highlights of which are summarized in the paragraph following, are therefore presented primarily as suggestive of meaningful differences in the self-images of high and low level of aspiration groups. As such, they appear to be worth further exploration with more refined techniques.

The general picture of the high level of aspiration individual which is suggested can be sketched in lightly as follows. It would seem that he views himself as an assertive, confident person who is at the same time attention-seeking, and somewhat demanding and over-anxious to reach his goals. Furthermore, he appears to feel that characteristics like the latter may be too strong within him, sin- he expresses a desire to have less of them. On the other hand, the low level of aspiration people seem to feel concerned about a lack of assertiveness, optimism, and perseverance, since they say they would like to stand higher on such traits. At the same time the low group expresses a desire to be less sensitive, worrisome, and depressed. This over-all picture appears to be generally consistent with the often reported description of the high aspiration person as a dominant, self-confident, ambitious, and somewhat unrealistic individual.

Discussion

Self-criticalness

The results of the study indicate clearly that the goal-striving characteristics presumably involved in the experimental level of aspiration measures are not related to the degree of over-all self-criticalness, or dissatisfaction with self, revealed on the Check List. It will be recalled that this self-criticalness measure represents merely the frequency with which the individual expresses a desire to change his status on a group of traits. It is obvious that this score provides no information as to the magnitude of the discrepancy between his perceived and desired status on the various traits, a measure which would be more analogous in some respects to the goal discrepancy score used as the level of aspiration measure in this study. Nevertheless, it is somewhat surprising that no consistent relationships were found between the self-criticalness measure and level of aspiration.

A complicating factor here could be that the psychological meaning of the self-criticalness scores may be quite equivocal. For example, low self-criticalness scores might represent for some persons a genuine satisfaction with self, but for others, a rather marked overt expression of apparent self-satisfaction on the part of a somewhat defensive, sensitive personality.

If one regards the self-criticalness scores as reflecting degree of self-acceptance, then the results of the present study are not in agreement with those recently reported by Cohen (3), who found significant

curvilinear relationships for 50 male and female patients between self-acceptance as judged from Rorschach protocols and goal discrepancy scores based on a motor task. Similarly, there is lack of agreement between our results and the correlation of .51 reported by Bills (1) between goal discrepancy scores on the same motor task as that used by Cohen, and self-acceptance scores which were based on the extent to which the individual "liked" or "disliked" his reported status on a list of 49 traits. However, the correlations reported by Bills for four other level of aspiration tasks (.01, .08, .13, and .18), the first three of which were of the paper-and-pencil variety, revealed little or no relationship between level of aspiration and self-acceptance, as was the case in the present study. The fact that our investigation yielded no relationships between self-criticalness and aspiration level of the magnitude reported by Cohen, or by Bills in the case of the one motor task, may of course be attributable to obvious differences in procedure and specific techniques, which are quite critical in this area of research.

Extreme self-criticalness

The obtained findings indicating slight positive relationships between the level of aspiration measures and the frequency of occurrence of the extreme self-critical responses are of considerable interest. As mentioned previously, these response-combinations (of the type: "I am very intelligent, and would like to be more so") represent a relatively atypical expressed wish to move still further in the

"better" direction even though present status is perceived as already being at the "good" extreme of the trait continuum. It might be hypothesized further, that the number of such extreme responses reflects the intensity of the individual's desire to approximate his ego-ideal. Since a relatively high number of these extreme responses was found to be associated both with the tendency to set high levels of aspiration, as well as with the tendency to set aspirations which are relatively unresponsive to performance changes, it is suggested that what may be running through all three of these measures is the intensity of the individual's desire to approximate the ideal self even when the present self-image is highly favorable.

Summary and Conclusions

This research was concerned with the relationship between the individual's level of aspiration on two cognitive tasks, and his perceived and desired status on various personality and ability traits. The results of the study indicated that the height of the individual's level of aspiration on the cognitive tasks was not related to his overall self-criticalness, or dissatisfaction with self. However, high aspiration level tended to be associated somewhat with a relatively favorable self-appraisal on a cluster of ability traits, and also with the desire to attain a more favorable status even when present status is perceived as already being very high. Individuals who showed the two characteristics just mentioned tended not only to set high levels of aspiration on the cognitive tasks, but also to adjust their levels

of aspiration from trial to trial with little regard to preceding upward or downward shifts in their performance. A comparison of the individual trait responses given by high and low level of aspiration groups suggested that these groups may be differentiable in terms of psychologically meaningful trait clusters.

Although most of the relationships found were of small magnitude, the over-all results of the study suggest that the group level of aspiration measures appear to be tapping meaningful self-evaluative tendencies. Of particular interest for further research is the possibility that the level of aspiration measures reflect, to some extent at least, the intensity of the individual's desire to approach his ideal self, or ego-ideal. In subsequent studies it might be fruitful to direct particular attention to the relationships between expressed levels of aspiration on cognitive tasks, and independently obtained estimates of the strength of the individual's desire to close the gap between his perceived and desired status, especially in the general area of skills, abilities, and achievements.

References

1. Bills, R. E. A comparison of scores on the Index of Adjustment and values with behavior in level of aspiration tasks. J. consult. Psychol., 1953, 17, 206-212.

2. Cattell, R. B. Confirmation and clarification of primary personality factors. Psychometrika, 1947, 12, 197-220.

3. Cohen, L. D. Level of aspiration behavior and feelings of adequacy and self acceptance. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1954, 49, 84-86.

4. Dembo, T. Untersuchungen zur Handlungs- und Affektpsychologie. X. Der Arger als dynamisches Problem. (Investigations in the psychology of action and affection. X. Anger as a dynamic problem.) Psychol. Forsch., 1931, 15, 1-144.

5. Frank, J. D. Individual differences in certain aspects of the level of aspiration. Amer. J. Psychol., 1935, 47, 119-128.

6. Hausmann, M. F. A test to evaluate some personality traits. J. gen. Psychol., 1933, 9, 179-189.

7. Hoppe, F. Untersuchungen zur Handlungs- und Affektpsychologie. IX. Erfolg und Misserfolg. (Studies on the psychology of action and emotion. IX. Success and failure.) Psychol. Forsch., 1930, 14, 1-63.

8. Murray, H. A. Explorations in personality. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938.

9. Ricciuti, H. N. A review of procedural variations in level of aspiration studies. San Antonio: Human Resources Research Center, 1951 (Research Bulletin 51-24).

10. Ricciuti, H. N. & Schultz, D. G. The development of experimental level of aspiration techniques for group administration. J. Personality, in press.

11. Schultz, D. G. & Ricciuti, H. N. Level of aspiration measures and college achievement. J. gen. Psychol., in press.

12. Sears, P. S. Levels of aspiration in academically successful and unsuccessful children. J. abnorm. soc. Psychol., 1940, 35, 498-536.